



# Public perception of A8 migrants: the discourse of the media and its impacts

## An Outline Review by BEMIS

Jan Semotam

The Black & Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland

Tel. 0141 548 8047

Fax. 0141 548 8284

[www.bemis.org.uk](http://www.bemis.org.uk)

[mail@bemis.org.uk](mailto:mail@bemis.org.uk)

38 Queen Street

Centrum Offices

Glasgow

G1 3DX

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## 1. Background to Review

This document provides an Outline Review of the research<sup>1</sup> entitled “Public perception of A8 migrants: the discourse of the media and its impacts” created as part of the arrangement between BEMIS (Empowering Scotland’s Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities) and the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network’s (GRAMNet). The aim of this review is to highlight the main findings of the dissertation and to translate them into material appropriate for the needs of the third sector. It is part of a wider process of creation of a sector-wide forum addressing issues related to the ways migrants are portrayed in the media and how these impact on public perceptions of them.

Full text of the original study can be downloaded from the BEMIS website:

<http://bemis.org.uk/publications.html>

### 1.1 Introduction

On 01 May 2004, eight countries from the former ‘Eastern Bloc’ joined the European Union (EU) in what was the single largest enlargement of the union in its history. These countries – Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - have been grouped together into the ‘Accession Eight’ or ‘A8’. It has been estimated that at least half a million A8 nationals have come to the UK since 2004 making it one of the most important social phenomena in recent years. On 30 April 2011, all transitional limitations on the A8 countries (but not the A2 – Bulgaria and Romania – that joined in 2007) were lifted throughout those old Member States that had opted for them, marking an important step for A8 nationals wishing to exercise their right to travel, work, study, and live anywhere within the EU area.

The enlargement and the consequent migration have received extensive mass media coverage throughout the world. Mass media in the old Member States, and especially in the UK, have been focusing on the numbers of people arriving from the A8 countries and the potential impact this movement might have on the host society. Coverage has been ranging from welcoming the migrants as a needed workforce to fearing the ‘floods’ of cheap labour taking jobs away from the host population and infesting it with criminality. The substantial scale and variety of the media coverage that these issues have received raises an important question: “To what extent do the media influence their audiences and, consequently, how these audiences then perceive and interact with the newly arrived A8 migrant community?” This paper therefore, looked at how much influence do the media (in this case, the press) in Scotland have on their audiences when it comes to the portrayal of the A8 migrant community in the country. By doing so, it aimed to identify the connection between processes of public perception and social inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The original dissertation was written by Jan Semotam who is also the author of this review.

## 1.2 Past Research Limitations

Despite the large economic and societal change that this vast movement of people has brought, relatively little academic research has been done with regards to some of the issues linked to the phenomenon. Several studies have been carried out looking at some of the economic and social impacts of the migration on both the Scottish host population and the newly arrived A8 migrants.<sup>2</sup> It has also been analysed how the media portray minorities and migrants in their coverage or how the A8 minority individuals find their new lives in the UK and in Scotland in particular. However, it seems that no comprehensive research has been done on linking the changes coming out of the seven-year period since the eight Central and East European (CEE) countries joined the European Union and the perceptions of these changes and of the people who came to the UK by the resident Scottish population. The viewpoint of the local population has so far not been academically addressed.

## 1.3 Evidence Reviewed

Research for this project was carried out in three different stages - library based analysis of academic discourses regarding the media's impact on social inclusion and integration, library based content analysis of newspapers and a case-study involving focus groups and interviews.

A variety of media-related literature was analysed; themes included the role that mass media play in the society, who or what influences their everyday operations and the effects they can have on their audiences. These were then worked into theoretical considerations that could pose relevant questions for the empirical research stages.

Content analysis was done using the Newsbank online database of the following newspapers: Scottish tabloid - Daily Record, Scottish edition of a free newspaper - Metro, Scottish broadsheet- The Herald, national broadsheet- the Guardian and Scottish edition of a national tabloid - the Scottish Sun. These newspapers were chosen because they represent the largest circulation numbers by newspaper type in Scotland.

Discussion-based focus groups and individual interviews were chosen as the best available source of relevant data for this project as interviews offer the chance to effectively ask questions that are open-ended or too complex for other methods, such as questionnaires. Seven participants were interviewed in two focus groups (2 and 5) and seventeen individually. Long-term residency of at least 10 years in Scotland was the only choosing criterion that had to be met by all participants. Focus groups centred on the participants' general awareness of the A8 countries and nationals, preferences of newspapers, reasons behind their choices and the ways the newspapers influence their perception of A8 migrants in Scotland.

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<sup>2</sup> Canton et al. (2008), De Lima et al. (2007), Equal Opportunities Committee (2010), Glasgow City Council (2007), Jack (2007), KnowFife Findings (2007) or Pollard et al. (2008)

## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1 Media Impact

Looking at the role that the media play in the society, it is particularly important to realise that they facilitate communication between the sender of a message and the receiver of that message. Using the media is a two-sided process and it is significant not only how we send a media message but also how we receive that message. Mass media have become omnipresent in our everyday lives; it is nearly impossible to imagine our day without newspapers, television, radio or the Internet and very difficult to overestimate the important roles these play in our contemporary society. It is the mass media that most often act as a bridge between people's private lives and their relation to the public world; it is through the mass media that we learn about our place in the society. They are both a force for integration and for dispersion and individuation of society.

Media messages matter. They are not somehow separate from our 'real' lives; picked up for fun and discarded when we turn to the important things. On the contrary, media messages are central to our everyday lives. Media influence our understanding of the world around us because media content can spread basic messages about the nature of reality. For many people, perhaps even the majority, mass media provide the best – and only – easily accessible approximation of ever-changing political, economic and social realities. By providing only partial information about personalities, issues, or events, the media can, to an extent, control what their audiences know about them and how they think about them. The only way to influence what people think is precisely to shape what they think about.

The 'active audience' theory sees the media as merely a tool or a resource which people can use to help them make sense of current events. Audiences are active because they can interpret and process media messages in their own way; they do not simply receive a media text but instead develop independent interpretations of what that text means. These interpretations can be influenced by a number of social factors, including friends, family, colleagues, class, and education; people constantly draw upon collective resources and experiences to create an individual understanding of media messages.

No man is an island, and readers, viewers and listeners do not form and maintain the ways they use information completely on their own. There are many external influences that guide us in our perception of the media and that manipulate how we use them and what we use out of them. The same media message can have very different meanings to different people. The media therefore, have to focus on how they distribute their messages so that the audience would interpret them in the most desired way. The only way to influence what people think is precisely to shape what they think about. The media "may not persuade the public directly; nevertheless they affect what people know, and what they think is important.

## 2.2 Ethnic Coverage

Ethnic coverage in the media tends to distract public attention from real problems by manufacturing events, inflating trivial issues and tending to focus inordinate attention on the more bizarre and unusual elements of minority communities, such as youth gangs, illegal immigration, or interracial violence. In some parts of the media there is a negative campaign almost to scare people sometimes about the impact of migration. Events that are seen as most problematic or threatening to the interests of the white majority tend to be most prominent in ethnic coverage which rather closely reproduces, confirms, and legitimates prevailing ethnic ideologies as well as the power relations based on them. The Equal Opportunities Committee (2010) noted that “the media tend to fixate on perceived difficulties experienced in the South East of England where population density is higher [...] and in Scotland, there is not enough focus on the essential contribution that migrants make to our ageing, declining population.”

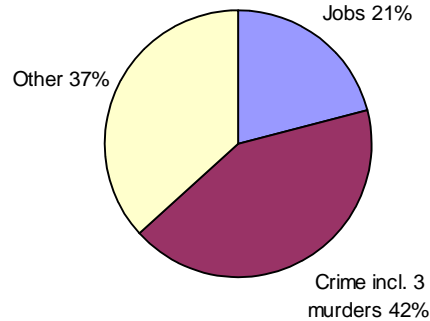
Research on media coverage of ethnic minority groups conveys public knowledge, as well as expressed or implicit opinions, about social groups and events most majority group members have little direct knowledge about. It is this notion that guided this research, looking at how much the Scottish audience knows about the A8 migrant community around them and how it reflects the media coverage of the group in the main daily newspapers.

## 2.3 Newspaper Analysis

Together, the five analysed newspapers have a daily circulation of over 800.000 copies in Scotland, which makes them control a majority of the country’s daily newspapers market and so makes them the most influential printed mass media in Scotland. The articles included in the analysis were judged as positive, negative or neutral towards the A8 migrant community in Scotland (and in the UK as a whole).

According to many, the press has been a main foe of black and other minorities. As a representative of the white power structure, it has consistently limited the access, both as to hiring, promotion or points of view, of ethnic minority groups. The press coverage of the A8 minority in Scotland could not be called balanced as none of the five newspapers offered a viewpoint of the A8 minority other than very few articles describing the lives of several A8 nationals in the UK and no A8-related cultural events or issues were reported on. Four out of the five researched newspapers showed a relatively positive stance towards the A8 migrant community despite being very different types of newspapers with different target audiences. Only the Sun was openly negative about the migration phenomena. Although crime featured prominently in the coverage of all five newspapers (as shown in Figure 1 below), it often had a balanced viewpoint in the general crime coverage. However, the two brutal murders in 2008 by A8 nationals did receive extensive attention and arguably could have caused the audience to perceive the minority in negative terms as a community with high risk of criminal activity. Importantly, the fact that disproportionate scale of crime coverage included mentions of the A8 migrant community potentially creates a situation when the group is stigmatised and perceived as prone to criminal activity.

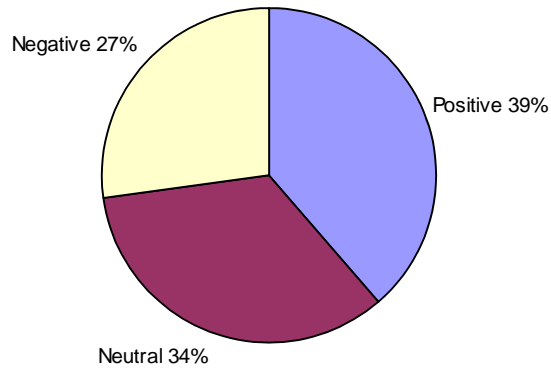
**Figure 1: A8 Migrants Press Coverage Themes**



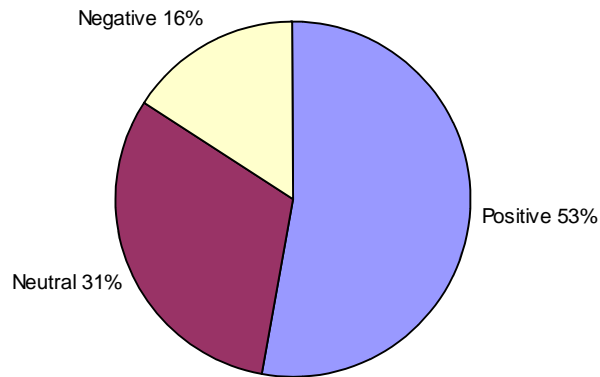
The second largest issue covered was that of jobs and employment. The three Scotland-based newspapers had a lot of positive coverage showing the A8 migrants as hard-working people who are in the country for its own benefit doing jobs the indigenous population does not want to do. Several economic and social benefits were mentioned in relation to the A8 community in Scotland and although sometimes the articles tended to crave sensationalism, the coverage overall was managed in an arguably responsible manner. The same could be said about the Guardian but certainly not of the Sun which offered a negative portrayal of 'floods of migrants taking British jobs and abusing British welfare while raising the crime and prostitution figures'.

It is fair to say that most of the coverage of the five researched newspapers could be described as positive towards the A8 minority in the UK and focusing on a variety of topics related to the community. The coverage of the Sun tabloid newspaper continuously strived to stigmatise the group by focusing on themes of crime, welfare abuse, 'floods' of migrants and disadvantaged of migration to the indigenous British population. This search for sensationalism was not shared by the remaining four newspapers, and contrary to some of the previously published documents, especially the Equal Opportunities Committee's 2010 Report, it was found that the A8 minority was mainly portrayed positively as a group of hard-working people who come to Britain to seek better future for themselves taking jobs that the indigenous population does not want to do and using a minimum of the welfare provisions available to them.

**Figure 2: A8 Migrants Press Coverage**



**Figure 3: A8 Migrants Press Coverage excl. The Sun**



Despite the upmarket papers providing considerable analysis and commentary in addition to news reportage, the ethnic coverage itself could not be called balanced. This is an issue that needs to be addressed to avoid the creation of stereotypes, both negative and positive, that could lead to an erosion of the processes of integration and social inclusion. What was confirmed by the newspaper analysis is that the 'us and them' mentality is deeply entrenched in the newspapers and despite the generally positive coverage, there is a lack of recognition of the need for a balanced overview of the A8 community which could ease the social processes of integration and inclusion.



## 2.4 Interviews and Focus Groups

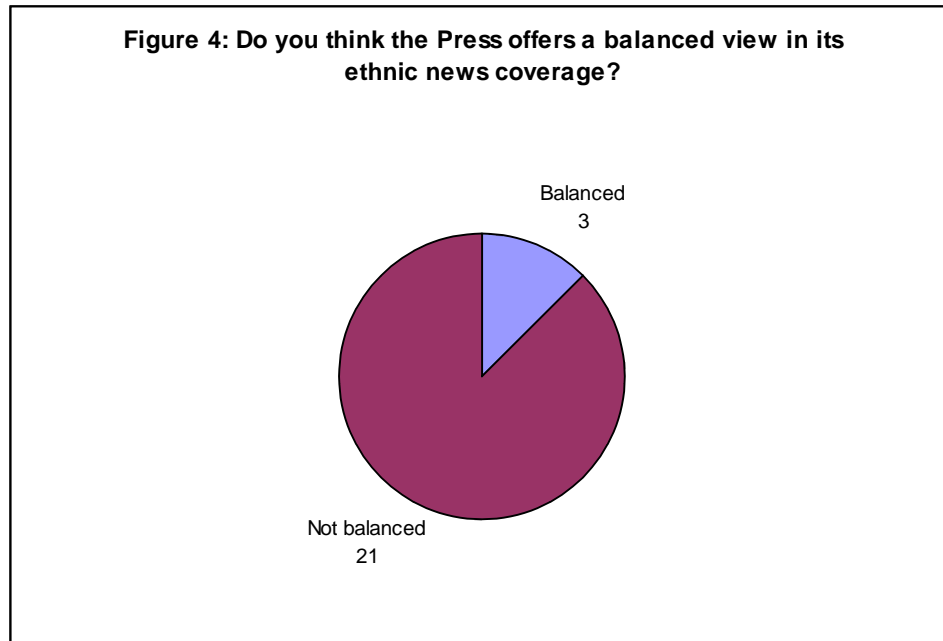
Some questions were designed to find out how aware the participants were of the A8 countries and what they knew about them. The results revealed that there is a general lack of awareness of the A8 countries; only a third could name all countries that joined the EU in 2004. The rest was struggling with the question, with only four naming Hungary and only two Lithuania. However, a majority could name Poland and the Czech Republic; this could be because of the media coverage tending to focus predominantly on the Polish who have become not only the largest A8 group in the UK but who are now the largest migrant group in the UK overall. Interestingly, five participants also included Romania on the list which suggests that the former Communist countries are still perceived as a homogenous bloc of states of which people in Scotland lack sufficient knowledge. Most common answer to a question asking what the participants knew about the A8 countries included references to their Communist past and major economic and/or social problems. Nobody mentioned any concrete examples of the countries' culture, events, things like music, art, food and drinks or personalities. The 2009 Glasgow City Council's report on A8 nationals in the city voices concerns with a related issue: "The A8 population is diverse, and for service planning purposes close attention should be paid to this diversity. The needs of different groupings within the wider A8 community vary significantly and will require a range of different support mechanisms." Looking at the interview and focus group results, it seems however, that a majority of the Scottish population has little or no awareness of these differences and tends to treat the community as a homogenous one.

**Table 1: Can you name all CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004?**

Poland	19	Romania	5
Czech Republic	18	Ukraine	1
Latvia	16	Croatia	1
Slovenia	15	Turkey	1
Slovakia	14	Bulgaria	1
Estonia	14		
Hungary	13		
Lithuania	11	All eight	9

While negative migrant-related issues are legitimate issues, the near-exclusive emphasis on such negative stories has resulted in a stereotype of racial minorities as 'problem people', groups either beset by problems or causing them for the larger society. While this is perhaps true for some other minority groups in the UK, the interviews showed that a majority of participants did not see the A8 nationals in Scotland as 'problem people' and instead praised the benefits they are bringing to the Scottish society. The interviewed participants mostly recognised that the ethnic coverage of the press is not balanced and commented on the bias it has in favour of the stereotypical white Britons. However, there was a major difference in their perception of the press' stance on A8 minorities. Whereas the participants claimed that the press was mostly negative about the group, the newspaper analysis

revealed that in fact, this was not the case as a vast majority of articles in the past seven years was either positive or neutral in nature.



It is difficult to suggest the extent to which the media have an impact on the Scottish audience in relation to the A8 migrants. Looking at personal experience with A8 migrants, there was a stark contrast between positive and negative experiences among the interviewed participants. Twenty two respondents out of twenty four said they had a positive direct experience with A8 migrants whereas only four said they had a negative one. It is clear that among the participants, A8 migrant community is seen in a very positive light. It is a generally known fact that Scotland is in need of migrant workers because its population is ageing and its numbers decreasing. However, this information was effectively spread through the mass media and has therefore, created a kind of a baseline for perceptions of migrants coming to the country. And the fact that being members of the European Union, the A8 migrants might not feel as threatening to the Scots as perhaps migrants from further outside of Britain, for instance Africa or Central Asia.

### 3. Future Research Recommendations

#### 3.1 Coverage Comparison

It could arguably be of interest to compare the perceptions people in Scotland have of a variety of ethnic minorities in the country and compare and contrast these with the media portrayals these groups are receiving. Each minority group is different from one another, sometimes only a little but often very much so. It is therefore, vital that future research should not focus on a single group only but try and compare how mass media portray a variety of ethnic minority groups and how these might impact on the majority's perceptions of these groups. A prime example of another group to include in a media research is the Roma coming from the 10 CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007.

#### 3.2 Expansion of Interviewed Sample

The lack of the social status variety of the interviewed participants was perhaps the biggest shortcoming of the sample studied. All 24 participants had received higher education at universities or colleges (all in the UK) and none could be considered a member of the working class. Although the sample could be argued to be a middle-class one, it is very varied within its limits. Future research should be carried out with a larger and more representative sample. This can be achieved either through interviews and focus groups again however; it would arguably also be beneficial to use a questionnaire. This could be distributed in person and filled in under the researchers' supervision or electronically as an online survey. Using this method could vastly expand the representative sample researched and consequently, show a more objective picture of the impact media have on public perceptions.

#### 3.3 Media Variety

Newspapers are only one of several different types of mass media and are limited in their potential to influence public perceptions. If further research is done on a similar theme, it is suggested that a variety of mass media is studied, including radio, television and the Internet. This would mean that all major mass media types are covered by the research and therefore, the 'real' effect mass media have on their audiences could arguably be evaluated.

#### 3.4 Two Sides

This paper aimed at analysing purely the impact that the press has on perceptions of A8 migrants within the Scottish population. However the social processes of integration and inclusion are not only one-sided and it would therefore, be useful in future research to include perceptions of the A8 migrant community as well. This would create a balance of opinions and would show how the minority feels it is being perceived in Scotland. Furthermore, involving the media industry in the debate itself answer questions related to the portrayal of A8 minorities by the media and the reasons behind it.

## 4. Conclusions and Way Forward

### 4.1 Perceptions of Central and East Europe

Both parts of the empirical research sections of this paper highlighted the fact that the A8 countries are still seen as a homogenous bloc of post-communist countries. Both the press and the audience tend to ignore, or be unaware, of the differences between the eight countries and their peoples. This lack of information and knowledge opens up a huge potential for perception influence not only by the media but various political, economic and social groups. What can be done to tackle this trend? Further research could be carried to see how the media could be used to educate their audiences about the specific realities of the A8 countries and their populations. This would arguably lead to an easing of the social integration processes within the Scottish society.

### 4.2 Press Coverage Balance

Although it is the media that most commonly get blamed for the lack of balance in their ethnic news coverage, it should be argued that it is a process in which not only the media take part. Minority groups should be encouraged to work closely with the media and promote their communities and actions they take within the media industry. Although the media must present news and documentary coverage in a way that fits a society's pre-existing conceptual frameworks and assumptions in order to make the material more acceptable and understandable, it is important to note that the contemporary society (not only in the UK) is increasingly becoming multicultural and multinational and therefore, ethnic similarities and differences are parts of everyday lives of the vast majority of the population. Increased coverage about ethnic events, issues or personalities from the minority's point of view would arguably lead to more balance perceptions of the migrant communities in Scotland.

### 4.3 Way Forward

Following the dissertation part of the Collaborative Dissertations project, the academic work will be translated into material appropriate to the needs of the partner organisation - BEMIS. This review is a part of this process but a much bigger task lies ahead.

The results of this research show that when it comes to the A8 migrant group, the media portrayal is largely positive and there seems to be no evidence of extensive stigmatisation of the group by the press in Scotland. In addition, the Scottish audience seems to view the A8 group in a positive light as a hard-working community making vital contributions to the Scottish society. The problem lies in the lack of balance in both the media coverage and the public awareness of the A8 migrant community. We often hear of the hard-working Eastern Europeans filling the gap in the decreasing Scottish population – the berry-pickers, plumbers, dentists and shop assistants. And we also hear of the traffickers, prostitutes, petty thieves, rapists and drunk-drivers. These are two very particular and very extreme portrayals. But what do we hear about anything in between? How much is there about this minority's culture, their events like various festivals, holidays and celebrations; their

music, art, food and drink; their personalities and societies; or simply their everyday lives in this country and how they interact with the host community? It's fair to say there is not much of this around in the media or in our perceptions of this minority.

Two main issues are of an importance here; first, the 'pigeonholing' of A8 migrants by the media and second, the lack of knowledge and awareness about them among the population. They create a situation where there is a gap in understanding between peoples which complicates the process of the migrant group integrating into the society as well as the society's inclusion of the minority.

The challenge is to try and find a way of effectively making people aware of the need for a balanced, wider coverage of the A8 minority (and consequently, of minorities in general). By people, we mean the media industry, the policy makers as well as the minority groups themselves. There seems to be a need for cooperation that would lead to the theme to be examined from different viewpoints and a wider variety of issues reported on by the media. Ideally, this would mean an increased understanding between people easing the social processes of integration and inclusion.

What is needed is a forum where representatives of the media industry, policymakers, and minority groups can debate these issues and work constructively towards a creation of a charter that does not only recommend what could or should be done but also outlines who is responsible for the set of undertakings agreed on through the forum.

If you feel like this is something you or your organisation would like to be involved in, do get in touch with us.



The Black & Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland

Tel. 0141 548 8047

Fax. 0141 548 8284

[www.bemis.org.uk](http://www.bemis.org.uk)

[mail@bemis.org.uk](mailto:mail@bemis.org.uk)

38 Queen Street

Centrum Offices

Glasgow

G1 3DX

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview and Focus Groups Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation
1	24	M	Surveyor
2	46	M	Chairperson of Community Organisation
3	26	F	PhD student
4	28	M	PhD student
5	44	F	Police Officer
6	54	F	Teacher
7	27	F	Migrant Support Advisor
8	57	F	Health Improvement Director
9	22	F	UG Student
10	34	M	Underwriter
11	53	M	Writer
12	25	F	Buying Co-ordinator
13	24	M	Sales Engineer
14	56	M	Teacher
15	24	M	PG Student
16	24	M	PG Student
17	25	F	PhD student
18	23	M	Student sabbatical officer
19	58	F	Retired Education Officer
20	35	F	Brand Manager
21	23	F	Care worker
22	24	M	Musician
23	61	M	Retired Teacher
24	23	F	UG Student



Appendix 2 - Keywords used in the Newsbank and Metro searches

- Poland
- Polish
- Czech
- Slovakia
- Slovak
- Hungary
- Hungarian
- Slovenia
- Slovene
- Estonia
- Estonian
- Latvia
- Latvian
- Lithuania
- Lithuanian
- A8
- Migrant
- Eastern European
- New Member States

Additional keywords used in the Metro search:

Scotland, Scottish, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee, Perth, St Andrews, Fort William, Dunfermline, Paisley, Clydebank, Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Hamilton, Oban, Dumfries

### Appendix 3 – Questions for Focus Groups and Interviews

First name:

Age:

Occupation:

Political party preference:

- Q1. How many countries from Central and East Europe joined the EU in 2004 and 2007?
- Q2. Can you name them?
- Q3. What do you know about them?
- Q4. What is your main source of news information?
- Q5. What newspapers do you read and how regularly?
- Q6. Why do you read the particular newspapers?
- Q7. Do you discuss news stories with others? Where and how often?
- Q8. How important is the headline and its tone for your decision to read a newspaper article?
- Q9. Do you think the Press offers a balanced view in its ethnic news coverage? Is there a bias?
- Q10. What is the last news story you can remember about A8 migrants? Was it positive or negative?
- Q11. If you remember, what did you know/think about the A8 countries/people before their EU accession?
- Q12. What restrictions did the UK/EU as a whole apply on EU labour migration post-2004?
- Q13. What is your opinion on restricting labour migration within the EU?
- Q14. Do you think Scotland has benefited or lost out from the A8 migrants who came after 2004?
- Q15. Do you know any A8 migrants around you?
- Q16. Do you have any positive experience with A8 migrants?
- Q17. Do you have any negative experience with A8 migrants?
- Q18. Is your personal experience similar to the news coverage of the A8 minority?
- Q19. What do you think is the average age of an A8 migrant in Scotland?
- Q20. What do you think is the percentage of working A8 migrants in Scotland?
- Q21. Do you feel that you have personally benefited/lost out due to A8 migrants in Scotland?
- Q22. Why do you think A8 migrants come to Scotland?
- Q23. Do you think Scotland needs A8 and other migrants?
- Q24. In the 1970s an English newspaper printed the following advertisement by an English local authority. What do you think about it?

"Asian immigrants from East Africa please do not settle in the Leicester area, we do not have any facilities for you people."

How would you react if it was printed in 2011 by the Glasgow City Council regarding the A8 migrant minority?

Full text of the research paper can be downloaded from the BEMIS website:

<http://bemis.org.uk/publications.html>

More details about the Collaborative Dissertations project can be found on the GRAMNet website:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/gramnet/>

